Following a meeting held in September 2004, this conference discussed papers from Catherine Merridale, Josie McLellan, Tony Robben, Tarak Barkawi, Hew Strachan, Koen Vlassenroot, Alexander Watson, Edgar Jones and Alan Fitzgerald, with the aim of drawing together common themes and concerns prior to collective submission to the *Journal of Contemporary History*. The subject was more tightly focussed on the question of combat motivation than the previous meeting. The participants felt that by the end of the meeting the group had come a very long way from existing accounts which emphasised the importance of primary group solidarities, and were in a position to open up substantive new dimensions of the question. These included ideology, choice, training, psychology and coping strategies, the social composition of armies, and their connection to society.

Several of the papers converged around the role of military experiences themselves, both through training and more informally, in forging group cultures and psychological dispositions amenable to combat. Taken together, these papers thus constituted a sustained critique of primary group theory, instead adducing mechanisms of war concerning the individual. At the other end of this spectrum from the psychological to the social, several papers demonstrated the importance of far broader solidarities than those of primary groups, including national, ideological and imagined communities. Military culture, for the participants, was both a unique process of generating new identities and thereby sustaining its own motivations, and also in places inextricably linked to the social identities which soldiers brought with them.

Although the first meeting in September had largely agreed that issues surrounding sources should be left to individual contributors, rather than being subject to further substantial group discussion, in fact some of the richest discussions arose from shared problems of evidence and interpretation. The difficulties of academics comprehending combat experience, approaching personal memory critically, and recovering a psychological moment of combat which might not even be recoverable for its participants, all went beyond the immediate focus of the conference, generating suggestive perspectives on the historical recoverability of memory and experience. Despite such problems, most participants, whether historians or not, nonetheless felt that historians’ particular methodological skills, and their sensitivity to the particular in time and space, compensated for the difficulty of working historically, and were important tools in understanding combat motivation. Historicising the significance of primary groups to a period and style of war between about 1870 and 1970, which has been the focus of much existing literature, was another major insight of the conference.

Thus although several of the issues flagged in the first meeting for further discussion (religion in particular), did not receive much attention, these lacunae were amply countered by a series of new perspectives opened up by the papers and the lively discussions which followed.

Subject to their timely revision, the papers will be collectively submitted to the *Journal of Contemporary History* in May 2005.